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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS AND DRL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [CB](#)  
SUBJECT: CAMBODIA'S PEACEFUL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY MARCH

REF: PHNOM PENH 1491

11. (U) On December 10, Cambodia seized a prime opportunity to show its progress as an increasingly open society by allowing a Human Rights Day march and rally in Phnom Penh. The Ambassador took part in the orderly, peaceful march along with approximately 500 (some estimates as high as 1,000) human rights activists, monks, and other Cambodians. The march wound through a half mile of Phnom Penh's roads before convening on the centrally located Wat Phnom where a rally of approximately 3,000 participants took place. In the past two years, Human Rights Day rallies without marches have occurred in an enclosed space.

12. (SBU) On December 6, the Phnom Penh Municipality and the Ministry of Interior denied permission for the Human Rights Day march and rally citing public order and security concerns (reftel). On December 7, after consultation with the Ambassador and others, MOI officials apparently realized that allowing the march and rally would be a step forward for freedom of assembly and demonstration in the country.

13. (U) During the December 10 march, activists held banners with messages urging that all citizens get involved in the celebration of human rights, and one marcher used a bullhorn to lead calls for an end to human rights abuses. Marchers wore white t-shirts and caps commemorating the 59th year of the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A few police officers were on hand to assist with traffic -- poloff counted five police officers -- but vehicle traffic and public order were not a problem. Marchers walked a half mile from a public park in the northern part of the central city to Wat Phnom where they convened for a three-hour rally. Marchers were joined at Wat Phnom by approximately 2,000 additional participants. The United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General for Human Rights in Cambodia Yash Ghai also took part in the march and gave a speech at the rally. In his speech Ghai stated that it was important for the Cambodian people to stand up for their own rights, and not always rely on government officials to protect their rights. Some observers speculated that a rally of the opposition political party Human Rights Party held at the same time -- exploiting the association between its party name and this special day -- caused some to arrive late at the NGO-sponsored rally.

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